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ABSTRACT

Because contemporary society accepts inequalities in income and social privilege, its tolerance for the varied and divergent educational consumption of its citizens is understandable. However, the acceptance of a dual educational system by parents, local authorities, and governments has implications for government involvement and educational finance. Any shift of pupils from the public to the private school sector will generate fewer dollars per pupil for public education, with associated repercussions for staffing and programming. This paper examines the "riffling" effect within a publicly supported dual school system in Canada and in Australia in relation to (1) financial assistance; (2) enrollment shifts; (3) staffing patterns; and (4) programmatic considerations. Recently there has been a mounting provision of support to both public and private school sectors and an enrollment shift favoring private schools in both countries. Regarding staffing patterns, Canada has shown an increase in private school teacher employment and a decrease in public school teacher employment, while Australia's teaching population has steadily risen in both sectors, but with a sharper rate of increase in the private sector. Programmatic and ideological elements are linked to three factors (funding sources, funding stability, and established spending patterns) and raise many unresolved questions. The support of both public and private school systems from the diminishing pool of funds potentially moves both systems toward mere survival. The apparently healthy compromise between parental choice and government responsibility may further disperse available educational resources. Appended are 2 tables and 11 references. (MLH)

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REFLECTIONS ON THE CONSEQUENCES OF PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS

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REFLECTIONS ON THE CONSEQUENCES OF PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS

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We live in a society which accepts, for the most part without violent protest, inequalities in income and social privilege. It is therefore not difficult to understand the tolerance this same society extends toward the varied and divergence educational consumption of its citizens. An example of this tolerance is the existence of a system of education which allows and encourages the establishment and subsequent operation of private schools in addition to public schools.

The acceptability of this dual system in educational consumption by parents, local authorities, and government moves any concern from an ideological platform to one of economic. Irrespective of the benefits and disadvantages that may pervade the dual system educationally, the dominant issue becomes the extent and form to which government involvement should assume. It is at this level which one determines to what degree public funds are shifted into a venture with a mandate more idiosyncratic than a public system alone can afford. The importance of this issue is realized under the acknowledgment that any shift of pupils from the public to the private sector of the school system will generate fewer dollars in per pupil grants for the public school system with associated reprercussions on staffing and programming. It is this riffling effect within a publicly supported dual school system - public and private - that is of concern in this paper. In examining this effect, two countries, Canada and Australia, serve as foci.

The Riffling Effect

1. Financial Assistance. There has been a mounting provision of support to not only the public school sector within Canada and Australia but also the private school sector. Support for the private school usually accompanied by government regulations with regard to programs, facilities, staffing, and, in a few cases, tuition fees and student admission policies. The specifics of provincial arrangements for the public support of private schools in Canada demonstrate at once the considerable variations in commitment but at the same time a firm financial recognition and accommodation of private schools. For example, in 1984-85 private schools operating in Quebec and identified as "institutions declared of public interest" were supported from $1,057 per pupil at the pre-school level to $2,222 at the secondary level; amounts approximating 85 per cent of that allocated to public schools. Private schools not recognized as "of public interest" but "for grant purposes" received funding from $774 per pre-school pupil to $1,628 per secondary school pupil. The level of public funding for eligible private schools (1985) in the province of Saskatchewan, in comparison, was $1,704 per pupil or approximately 59 per cent of the total provincial per pupil grant to public schools. Public funding of private schools in Manitoba, on the other hand, takes the form of annually revised per pupil grants for instructional and textbook purposes. In 1984-85, these grants amounted to $622 and $40 respectively, representing approximately 20 per cent of the Manitoba per pupil operational grants to public schools. Finally, in the province of Alberta the grant received by qualified private schools is 75 per cent of the per pupil instructional grant to public schools.

In terms of public sector expenditure per pupil in Canadian elementary-secondary schools generally, the public school system expenditure has doubled from 1975 to 1980. The private school system expenditure has increased 1.5 times.

In Australia a similar commitment to the public support of private schools is evident. Prior to 1975 eight categories existed by which funding was allocated to private schools. Between 1975 and 1983, a collapse of these categories of need into three occurred along with the reestablishment of the percentage link with public school costs for even the wealthiest category of private schools, and an acceleration of the total proportion of funds going to private schools (+87.2% growth in funds to private schools, -24.2% growth in public schools) was witnessed. In 1984 the Government established a new twelve category option scheme for the funding of private schools. The wealthiest schools categories (1 and 2) were guaranteed their existing grants would be maintained in real terms though without the real increases applying to schools in all other categories. Public schools were to be given a real increase in funds of 50 per cent over eight years.

2. Enrolment Shift. As indicated by Table 1, the total pupil population (public together with private) of Canada enrolled at the elementary-secondary level has experienced steady decline since the mid-1970's. During the period 1975 to 1984, a decrease of 13.5 per cent was endured within the combined public and private school system. Public school enrolment over this time contracted by approximately 15.4 per cent. Private schools, on the other hand, enjoyed an

enrolment increase of 23.6 per cent. Since all increases in private school enrolments can be said to have been otherwise enrolled in public schools, it is fair to suggest that the growth in private school enrolments was responsible for a loss of pupils from the public system. The significance of the size of the percentage change not to be lessen given the numerically small but not insubstantial proportion of the nation's elementary and secondary school children enrolled in the private school system.

Australia, in comparison, has experienced sustained growth in its total pupil enrolment. Between 1975 and 1984, enrolment rose by 3.5 per cent (Table 1). Although overall there has been an increase in total enrolment, the public school system did show a slight drop in enrolment to the entent of less than one per cent. Enrolment in the private school system showed an increase of 15.6 per cent; and presently accounts for at least a quarter of the total number of pupils in the educational school system.

3. Staffing Patterns (F.T.E.). In Canada, the number of full-time equivalent teachers employed in public schools (Table 2) has been dropping since the mid-1970's while the private school teaching compliment has risen. Teachers employed by private schools rose from 9,281 in 1976 to 11,860 in 1984 (21.7 per cent). At the same time, teachers employed by public schools decreased from 264,408 to 256,655 (3.0 per cent). Thus, more than one-third of the decline in the public school teaching population may be accounted for by employment gains within the private school sector.

The experience in Canada however has not been evident in

Australia (Table 2). In both the public school sector and the private school sector of Australia, the full-time equivalent teaching population has risen steadily (22.4% public and 24.4% private). The rate of increase much steeper for the private sector than the public. 1976 to 1982 the full-time equivalent teaching complement of the private sector increased 24.4 per cent while within the public sector a comparable 8.8 per cent increase was observed.

4. Programmatic. Programmatic considerations with regards to public support for private schools implies some recognition of the resource implications of the different educational philosophies and practices of individual private schools. It is this linkage that causes concern for in most instances allocation schemes work on assumptions of what is as opposed to empirical grounding of what is. Therefore, though the programmatic element is important in any examination of the total riffling effect it is the one element that guesses remain. Nevertheless, three factors, namely source of funds, stability of funds, and established spending patterns, influence the impact of total dollar amount on program operation. The stability of income sources for a program determines the crisis threshold and the amount of staff time that must be diverted from daily operation to survival. The support of a public as well as a private school system from the limited, and of late diminishing, pool of funds potentially moves both systems toward the survival end of the spectrum.

Reflections on the Riffling Effect

As was seen in the brief survey of shifts that has occurred in finances, pupil enrolment, staffing, and programs within Canada and

Australia, the entire notion of survival within the context of all aspect of education is of great concern. Too often practical concerns within each of these dimensions has been sidelined while the philosophical arguments have played centre field. It is the province's and state's responsibility to ensure that there be universal access to an education for each child; yet, few look at responsibility in conjunction with the provision of quality in education. Despite the apparent healthy compromise between the rights of parents to choose where they have their child(ren) educated and the responsibilities of government, the consequences of this acceptability brings such a compromise into question. Access to educational programs and services is not equal across regions and the primary objective of any allocation scheme must be to reduce this gap in program accessability. There is therefore need to align the distribution of revenue for public and private schools to the actual defined costs of providing educational programs. More tangible and meaningful verification of aspects of educational program delivery are required. Furthermore, it must be noted that although the role of those in authority would at first sight appear to be reduced in a dual system, because of the diseconomies that emerge with institutional size reduction and the need to maintain available places within the public school system if parental preferences change the resources are further dispersed.

Table 1

Pupil Enrolment in Elementary-Secondary Public and Private Schools

Year	AUSTRALIA (1) PUBLIC	AUSTRALIA % of TOTAL ENROL [(1)+(2)]	AUSTRALIA (2) PRIVATE	AUSTRALIA % of TOTAL ENROL [(1)+(2)]	CANADA (3) PUBLIC	CANADA % of TOTAL ENROL [(3)+(4)]	CANADA (4) PRIVATE	CANADA % of TOTAL ENROL [(3)+(4)]
1975	2,290,400	78.7%	619,800	21.3%	5,412,884	96.7%	182,001	3.3%
1980	2,318,000	77.7%	666,400	22.3%	4,896,992	95.9%	209,399	4.1%
1984	2,281,022	75.6%	734,784	24.4%	4,690,910	95.2%	238,300	4.8%

Source: Commonwealth Schools Commission, Australian School Statistics. Statistics Canada, Elementary-Secondary School Enrolment.

Table 2

Full-time Equivalent Teaching Population in Elementary - Secondary Schools

Year	AUSTRALIA		CANADA	
	PUBLIC	PRIVATE	PUBLIC	PRIVATE
1976	129,668	29,700	264,408	9,281
1980	141,206	35,414	262,518	10,365
1982	142,157	39,295	260,325	11,464
1984	145,000	n/a	256,655	11,860

Sources: Commonwealth Schools Commission, Australian School Statistics. Statistics Canada, Elementary - Secondary School Enrolment.

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